

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L OSLO 2203

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, ENRG, NO, UR
SUBJ: GON OFFER OF OIL EXPLORATION MORATORIUM IN THE BARENTS SEA

1. THE PUBLICATION LAST WEEK IN OSLO OF A BOOK BY FORMER OSLO DCM JOHN AUSLAND HAS CREATED A CONSIDERABLE STIR IN POLITICAL CIRCLES IN OSLO. AUSLAND'S BOOK, "VAR OLJE -VAR MAKT" (OUR OIL-OUR POWER) REVEALED THAT THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT IN ITS BOUNDARY DISCUSSIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION IN 1975 TOLD THE SOVIETS IT WAS PREPARED TO CONSIDER A MORATORIUM ON OIL EXPLORATION IN THE BARENTS SEA IF THIS WOULD AID THE TWO GOVERNMENTS IN REACHING AN AGREEMENT ON THE DISPUTED BOUNDARY BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. AFTER SEVERAL DAYS OF PRESS PLAY ON THE SUBJECT, THE FOREIGN MINISTRY ON APRIL 26TH CONFIRMED THAT SUCH A PROPOSAL WAS MADE BY THE NORWEGIAN DELEGATION IN THEIR TALKS WITH THE RUSSIANS IN DECEMBER 1975. THE MINISTRY STATEMENT ADDED THAT "TO FACILITATE AGREEMENT REGARDING THE DIVIDING LINE, IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT NORWAY COULD ACCEPT A LIMITED AREA ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BOUNDARY LINE FOR A LIMITED TIME PERIOD WHICH WOULD NOT APPLY TO OIL ACTIVITY. THE PREREQUISITE WAS AGREEMENT

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ON A FINALLY DESIGNATED DIVIDING LINE." THE MINISTRY STATEMENT ALSO NOTED THAT THE RELEVANT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES HAD BEEN INFORMED OF THE NORWEGIAN OFFICER.

2. AFTER CHECKING OUR FILES, THE EMBASSY CONCLUDED THAT WE HAD NO RECORD HERE OF HAVING BEEN INFORMED OF THIS NORWEGIAN OFFER IN 1975. DEM, THEREFORE, REQUESTED A MEETING WITH MFA

DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS CHRISTIANSEN ON MAY
3RD TO SEEK ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE NORWEGIAN OFFER.

3. CHRISTIANSEN STATED THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S APRIL 26TH
STATEMENT BASICALLY TOLD ALL OF THE FACTS THAT WERE AVAILABLE TO
HIM. THE NORWEGIAN SUGGESTION, WHICH HAD BEEN FORMULATED BEFORE
THE BOUNDARY DELEGATION WENT TO MOSCOW, HAD BEEN PREVIOUSLY LAID
BEFORE THE STARTING FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE. CHRISTIANSEN
NOTED THAT THE PROPOSAL HAD ENCOUNTERED SUBSTANTIAL OPPOSITION
WITHIN THE MFA. THE NORWEGIAN SUGGESTION BASICALLY PROPOSED
THREE CONDITIONS FOR THE MORATORIUM ON OIL ACTIVITY: FIRST,
THAT THERE BE A PRIOR AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES
ON THE DELIMITATION OF THE DISPUTED BOUNDARY; SECOND, THAT
THE MORATORIUM BE LIMITED IN TIME (HERE CHRISTIANSEN SAID THAT
THE NORWEGIANS HAD MENTIONED A 10-15 YEAR TIME PERIOD); AND
FINALLY, THAT THE MORATORIUM WOULD BE LIMITED IN AREA. IN
RESPONSE TO THE DCM'S QUESTION, CHRISTIANSEN SAID THAT THE AREA
WAS NEVER ACTUALLY DELINEATED BY THE NORWEGIANS WHO MERELY
MADE THE POINT ORALLY TO THE SOVIETS IN THE COURSE OF THE
TALKS AND INDICATED IN GENERAL TERMS AN AREA AROUND THE
BOUNDARY WHICH WOULD BE EFFECTED.

4. CHRISTIANSEN WAS NOT CERTAIN WHETHER THE PROPOSED AREA
FOR THE OIL MORATORIUM EXTENDED BEYOND NORWAY'S 200 MILE
ECONOMIC ZONE (WHICH, OF COURSE, AT THAT TIME HAD NOT YET
BEEN ESTABLISHED). CHRISTIANSEN ALSO STATED THAT AS FAR AS
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HE KNOW THERE HAD BEEN NO CLEAR SOVIET REACTION EITHER AT THAT
TIME OR IN SUBSEQUENT TALKS TO THE NORWEGIAN PROPOSAL. HOWEVER,
HE DID SAY THAT IN A RECENT DISCUSSION (AND HERE HE ASKED FOR
THE INFORMATION TO BE GUARDED VERY STRICTLY) THE SOVIETS
HAD RETURNED TO THE POSSIBILITY OF A "MORATORIUM" FOR OIL
ACTIVITY. AS FAR AS CHRISTIANSEN KNEW THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT,
HAVING ONCE MADE THE PROPOSAL TO THE SOVIETS, CONSIDERED
THAT IT WAS STILL ON THE TABLE THOUGH HE SAID THAT HE DOUBTED
IF THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT HAD REALLY GIVEN MUCH THOUGHT TO IT IN
RECENT MONTHS. CHRISTIANSEN ADDED THAT HE THOUGHT THE SOVIETS WOULD
BE HAPPIEST WITH A MORATORIUM WITHOUT A BOUNDARY AGREEMENT
BUT REITERATED THAT A PRIOR AGREEMENT ON A BOUNDARY WAS ONE
OF THE NORWEGIAN THREE PRECONDITIONS FOR A MORATORIUM.

5. NOTING THAT HE WAS SPEAKING PERSONALLY THE DCM STATED
THAT AS FAR AS WE COULD TELL FROM OUR EMBASSY RECORDS, THE
USG HAD NOT BEEN INFORMED OF THE NORWEGIAN OFFER OF A MORATORIUM
ON OIL ACTIVITY. HE ADDED THAT IT WAS QUITE POSSIBLE
THAT OUR RECORDS FROM DECEMBER 1975 WERE INCOMPLETE,
THOUGH HE NOTED THAT THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL SVALBARD
CONSULTATIONS WHICH TOOK PLACE TWO WEEKS AFTER THE NORWEGIAN-
SOVIET BOUNDARY TALKS, MADE NO REFERENCE WHATSOEVER TO THE

MORATORIUM PROPOSAL.

6 COMMENT: THE AUSLAND REVELATION CLEARLY CAUGHT EVERYONE IN OSLO BY SURPRISE, INCLUDING SEVERAL RANKING MEMBERS OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (NONE OF WHOM WHO WERE IN THEIR PRESENT POSITIONS AT THE TIME FO THE OFFER). WE ALSO KNOW THAT UNDERSECRETARY OF STATE IN THE MINSTRY OF DEFENSE, HOLST, HAD HEAD NOTHING OF THE NORWEGIAN OFFER IN THE TWO YEARS HE HAD BEEN IN OFFICE. A QUICK CHECK WITH OUR BRITISH, FRENCH AND GERMAN COLLEAGUES HERE REVEALS THAT THEY TOO HAVE NO RECORD OF HAVING BEEN INFORMED BY THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT OF THE MORATORIUM OFFER MADE IN 1975.
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